

The Real Katrina Hurricane

by Don Tubesing

New Orleans, April 2006 – a dynamic and disparate community of resiliently-loving and ever-hopeful people hampered for the moment by crushing loss, overwhelming unknowns, and a decade of rebuilding ahead.

I wrote this narrative poem two weeks after my trip to New Orleans to help repair a church community center. A situation that is overwhelming and remains troublesome.

At a corner bar in the French Quarter I saw a special drink advertised.

They called it, “The Katrina Hurricane.”

It was very expensive.

I began to wonder, “What’s in it?”

But I didn’t need to ask.

I knew in my heart it must be a potent “morning after” drink.

....And here’s how it’s made.

First, you create a large handcrafted cup out of the soggy first page of your last year’s tax return and the ink-smeared back half of the first letter your daughter wrote you from college. You decorate the outside of this cup with a torn family photo and the tangled residue of a broken cassette tape for the ribbon—all of these items you easily find floating in your back yard.

Into this cup you pour

Two cups of water—the elixir of life -- living water,

.....Well, yes, it’s river water and a little cloudy, but

Hey, it’s still drinkable—

That is if you let the gunk settle to the bottom first.

And you drop in a little sparkle—the joy of finding that your neighbor has returned.... alive, Ah.....

But you also drop in a nugget of asphalt for spice,

Along with an ugly drop of old oil for spite.

You mix in the honey of remembered friendships that make you smile,

But into the cup you also wring out a bitter tear or two

From your tattered favorite shirt

That you found under the upturned chunk of sidewalk.

You pour in a half cup of graded gratefulness for the day's warm sun,
And for the knowledge that your sister is now safe in Atlanta,
And for the fact that you have finally found a store
That will fill your dad's Arthritis prescription.

...Yes!

Then, on top you sprinkle some
semi-toxic-blown-around-the-streets-dust
you found gathered at the curb
—just to add a burnt coffee aroma to the brew,
A choking smell that burns into your nose
And stops your breath short.

With a piece of broken board you find in the yard next door,
You stir all this together,
Until it turns into a pasty thickness—

Finally, you add a gob of soggy, damp, moldy insulation
To supply that *whip-cream-topping-cotton-candy* effect.

You warm it all with a caring, *sweaty-t-shirt-hug*
that you are offered—
that you relax into,
because it offers you the fleeting feeling of belonging
and comfort.

Then, you prepare to drink down your daily concoction—
A bittersweet, Maundy-Thursday type mixture,
Reeking of life on the edge of loss, trauma and uncertainty.

You find yourself wondering where you will sleep tonight.

And with an unsteady hand
you hold this Cup of Contradiction up to the Sun
and examine it carefully.

Finally, satisfied that you cannot see through it
To the light of the day on the other side,
You exclaim,

*"Ah.....THIS....IS....
The real KATRINA HURRICANE!"*

Not rational; Not comprehensible; Tough to swallow; Impossible to digest.

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